
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	2225 California Street, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Sheridan-Kalorama Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	October 4, 2012	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	11-472		Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott	X	New Construction
			Demolition

Architect Ralph Cunningham (Cunningham/Quill), representing Murillo/Malnati Group, seeks on-going conceptual review for construction of a five-story apartment building in the Sheridan-Kalorama Historic District. The property contains a small four-bay garage located at the rear of the lot abutting the alley.

When reviewed in January, the Board heard testimony from some neighbors purporting that the lot constituted a cultural landscape that warranted preservation. However, the Board did not concur with this position and determined that the general conceptual design for new construction was compatible with the character of the historic district. The applicants were asked to return with perspective views to show the extent of visibility of the penthouse, additional detailing and specifications, and information on the location of the utility meters.

Revised Proposal

As before, the plans call for a five-story, 50' tall apartment building with nine units. The building would be built adjacent to the party wall of the rowhouse to the west, with a 12'6" side yard on the east. The elevations would be clad in brick with a precast belt course defining a one-story base, a second belt course and lighter colored brick differentiating the top story, and capped by a precast cornice.

The primary roof of the penthouse would be 10'4" high; the elevator overrun would rise to 12'1". The penthouse would be set back approximately 21 feet from the front and rear and 12 feet from the sides, and clad in aluminum panels with glass walls facing east. A glass railing for a roof deck would extend around the perimeter of the building set back three feet from building's edge.

The garage at the rear of the site, which features a finished wall with decorative arched brickwork and half-round windows facing the property, would be largely retained and reused for the entrance to a below-grade parking garage and to house two parking spaces at the alley level. More detailed alteration and section drawings have been provided that show the extent of removal, retention, and alteration.

Evaluation

The revised penthouse plan has more than doubled the previously-proposed front and rear setback from 10 feet to approximately 21 feet. As shown in the perspective renderings, it will not have prominent visibility from public view. Window and door specifications and detailing have been developed to include aluminum-clad wood casements and an aluminum-clad entrance door. In an effort to make the entrance more prominent, a two-story door surround and projecting canopy have been added. The roof line would be capped by a projecting precast cornice.

The window, door and trim elements are contemporary in detailing but will have an overall proportion and general appearance that are consistent with other apartment buildings in the historic district, as stipulated in the preservation regulations (DCMR 10C, Chapter 23: Standards for Window Repair and Replacement):

2312.1 Windows in new construction within an historic district should be appropriate for the building and in most cases generally consistent in character with the windows found in the historic district.

2312.2 Windows should generally be made of the materials characteristic of similar building types within the historic district.

2312.3 This guidance is intended to promote design compatibility with historic buildings and districts, rather than to discourage good contemporary design or creative architectural expression.

The electric meters will be housed within the building; the gas meters will be housed out of public view on the side elevation.

In repurposing the existing garage as the entrance to the new below-grade parking, some modification will be made to the rear (south) wall to provide the necessary clearance, and the roof sheathing will be removed, with the joists retained as pergola-like structure. As outlined in the applicant's submission, the extent of removal does not constitute "demolition" as defined by the preservation regulations (DCMR 10C, Chapter 3):

305.1 Work considered demolition under the Act shall include, but is not limited to, any of the following, as determined by the Mayor's Agent:

- (a) The removal or destruction of any façade;*
- (b) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the structural components of the building, such as structural walls, floor assemblies, and roofs;*
- (c) The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the roof along with all or substantially all of one or more exterior walls;*

- (d) *The removal or destruction of all or substantially all of an entire wing or appendage of the building, such as a rear ell, unless the wing lacks physical or historic integrity, or is not a character-defining feature;*
- (e) *The removal or destruction of a substantial portion that includes character-defining features of the building or structure;*
- (f) *The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of a designated interior landmark, unless the elements to be removed lack physical or historic integrity, or are not character-defining features; or*
- (g) *Any removal or destruction requiring a partial demolition or raze permit under the D.C. Construction Code, including any demolition of non-bearing walls, interior finishes, or other interior non-bearing elements within a building where an interior space has been designated as a historic landmark.*

305.2 In general, the determination whether a proposal involves destruction of a building “in significant part” shall depend on the extent to which character-defining historic features, historic or structural integrity, historic materials, or ability to convey historic significance would be lost. This decision shall depend on all the facts and circumstances of the case.

As the design continues to be refined, the detailing of the large corner windows and their relationship to the masonry openings should continue to be evaluated; as suggested in the renderings (which admittedly are never entirely representative), the glazing looks essentially flush with the wall plane, giving the building surface a very sheer appearance, without shadow or depth. Setting the glazing further back into the openings or developing canted brick corner detailing similar to that used on the punched windows might be worthy of exploration. Similarly, it might be worth rendering a version of the elevation that eliminates or softens the strong tripartite organization of the façade. While a tripartite composition is certainly characteristic of classical architecture (which is the predominant influence on buildings in the historic district), the proportions of the proposed building and its otherwise asymmetrical composition may warrant looking at a design that eliminates one or both of the belt courses that separate the base, middle and top, and/or extends the same brick coloration into the top story that is used on the underlying floors.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board find the revised concept to be consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and, subject to study of the refinements suggested above, delegate final approval to staff.